

Hillhead Housing Association 2000

inspection report

AUGUST 2007



Ensuring decent housing
and strong communities across Scotland

Communities
Scotland

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1. Introduction

About this inspection

1.1 This inspection was carried out by Communities Scotland under section 69 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Our purpose in inspection is to provide an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery and make recommendations to help improvement. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of Performance Standards.

How we assessed performance

1.2 Our inspectors asked two key questions:

- How good are the services we have inspected?
- How well are these services being managed for improvement?

1.3 In order to answer these questions inspectors:

- spoke to tenants, staff and members of the governing body;
- asked other partner organisations for their views;
- visited homes and local areas;
- saw and tested first hand how well services were being delivered;
- examined key policies, publications, information and the organisation's self-assessment submitted for this inspection; and
- analysed published performance and financial information.

1.4 We have awarded grades for the housing management and property maintenance services. This is what our grades mean:

A	Excellent	Major strengths.
B	Good	Many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed.
C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.
D	Poor	Major areas where improvement is needed or where a number of very significant weaknesses are found.

The inspection team

1.5 The inspection was managed by John Jenkins, Inspection Manager, supported by Joyce Stewart and Tom Burns, Inspectors, Carolynne Watson and Heather Smith, Inspection Officers and Pauline McFadden, Financial Analyst. We were on site between 19 and 30 March 2007. The inspection team were assisted on site by Alex Condie, Tenant Assessor*. We would like to thank everyone involved in the inspection for their time and co-operation.

Responding to this inspection

1.6 We expect all inspected bodies to make the summary of this report available to anyone that wants it, report our findings to tenants and other stakeholders* and respond to the issues raised in this report. We require that the summary of this report is issued to all tenants.

* See glossary

2. Context

About the organisation

- 2.1 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 is an Industrial and Provident Society* with Charitable Status. It was registered with Communities Scotland in June 2004. The Association currently owns and manages 843 properties. This is the organisation's first inspection by Communities Scotland.
- 2.2 The Association operates exclusively on the Hillhead estate, situated in Kirkintilloch, some ten miles North East of Glasgow. Despite the more prosperous and affluent image of many parts of the East Dunbartonshire area, the Hillhead estate has consistently been identified with high concentrations of poverty, poor health, low educational attainment and substandard housing. Figures from the recent Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, released in October 2006, highlight East Dunbartonshire as having only three data zones in the most deprived 15% nationally. All three of these are located in Hillhead and contain elements of the Association's stock. The Hillhead estate has been designated as a priority area by East Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership. This designation will result in specific resources being directed to the estate by partner agencies in an effort to address the problems identified.
- 2.3 The Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR*) asks Registered Social Landlords (RSLs*) to select a peer group* which best describes their organisation. Hillhead selected the group described as "Small scale transfer RSLs". This is the group we use to compare Hillhead's performance.
- 2.4 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 was established following a stock transfer from East Dunbartonshire Council. A detailed funding proposal was developed by the local authority and attracted New Housing Partnership resources from the Scottish Executive. The Council's submission proposed a comprehensive package of improvement works to the 673 houses and cottage flats, with 190 three storey tenement flats being demolished and replaced with a phased

* See glossary

programme of approximately 160 low density new build properties for rent. The transfer of the 863 properties to the newly registered Association followed a successful ballot of tenants in October 2002. Although the majority of their housing stock is constructed of brick and timber, there are a small number of properties of non-traditional construction.

- 2.5 The Association has now completed the first two phases of internal improvements to 82 houses and cottage flats. The first phase of 45 new build houses was on site at the time of our inspection. Hillhead has also assisted a local owner and acquired their property through the Mortgage to Rent scheme.
- 2.6 The Association is governed by a voluntary management committee elected annually at its Annual General Meeting (AGM). The Association presently has 64 members. The management committee currently has ten members, four of whom are tenants of the Association.

Key facts

- 2.7 The table below presents a summary of key information for Hillhead Housing Association 2000, showing trends over the last three financial years.

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007*
Houses owned	863	852	843
Employees	15	17.3	16.9
Annual turnover (£'000)	£1,944	£2,958	£2,400**
Total possible rental income (£'000)	£1,552	£2,121	£2,182
Rental income from housing benefit	56.9%	46.08%	48.77%
Average weekly rent	£47.79	£49.36	£49.36
Average rent increase	4.5%	3.2%	3.2%
Houses re-let	44	74	33
Responsive repairs carried out	2072	2646	n/a
Maintenance spend per house	£244.10	£329	£422
Right To Buy sales	4	12	9

Source: Association's Inspection Submission.

* Figures relate to the period 1 April to 7 November 2006.

** Figure taken from current year's budget.

Challenges and commitments

- 2.8 As part of the transfer process from East Dunbartonshire Council, the Association made a number of commitments to tenants. Hillhead continues to develop its relationship with the Council, strategically through community planning and operationally as a significant social landlord in the local area.
- 2.9 At the time of our inspection, the Association had been operating as a landlord for some three years. This is a relatively short period for a new organisation to establish itself and develop its landlord services for tenants. It is important to note that there have been developments beyond core housing services provision. These would include:
- an active participation in local community planning;
 - contributions to the development of the local Common Housing Register*;
 - development of a single allocation policy across the Council and two local Registered Social Landlords*, Antonine Housing Co-op and Hillhead Housing Association 2000; and
 - an active role in wider regeneration in the estate which has seen the Association secure funding for a local Handyman/ Estate Caretaker, Welfare Rights Service and more recently, a feasibility study for a new Hillhead Community Hub complex.
- 2.10 As a condition of the stock transfer, the Association were obliged to contract with East Dunbartonshire Council for a number of services. These include:
- responsive repairs service, along with the performance target timescales used by the local authority;
 - annual gas safety checks; and
 - open ground maintenance across the estate.
- These services are provided under a three year contract and are in place until summer 2007.

* See glossary

Challenges

2.11 The Association has faced a number of challenges during the first three years of its operation:

- progressing the programmes for investment in the Association's housing stock scheduled for retention;
- in consultation with the local community and partner agencies, developing a "Masterplan" for the Hillhead estate;
- bringing forward proposals for the first phase of new build housing;
- establishing its own identity, separate from that of the local Council;
- overcoming a culture of non-payment of rent among tenants;
- improving the performance of the responsive repairs service; and
- improving on the low levels of tenant involvement in the housing service.

Commitments

2.12 The Association's contract with East Dunbartonshire Council formalises many of the commitments given to tenants at the time of the transfer ballot. Hillhead has made good progress in delivering many of these commitments. For example, the Association has delivered significant achievements in relation to:

- completing internal upgrading to 82 properties;
- commencing site operations on its first phase of 45 new build homes;
- capping annual rent increases at no more than the Retail Price Index (RPI) plus one per cent;
- improving the performance of its responsive repairs contractor;
- reducing the levels of rent arrears among its tenants; and
- establishing an Internal Audit function reporting to its Audit sub committee.

2.13 The future challenges facing Hillhead Housing Association 2000 include:

- the successful delivery of its planned investment programme to its retained houses;
- the construction of its new build housing developments;
- the demolition of its low demand, tenemental flatted blocks;

- continuation of effective working with partners, particularly in its wider social and economic regeneration role in the estate; and
- maintaining good working relationships with East Dunbartonshire Council at a strategic and operational level.

3. Housing management

3.1 The grade awarded for housing management is:

C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.
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We explain at the end of this section how the assessments and judgements we have made result in this grade.

How good is the service?

Access

Social landlords should provide open, fair and equal access to their housing lists and should work with partners to simplify and maximise access to housing.

3.2 Hillhead HA 2000 operates an open housing list that people aged 16 and over can join at any time. The Association has developed a Common Housing Register* (CHR) and shared allocation policy with its partner organisations, East Dunbartonshire Council and Antonine Housing Co-operative. Applicants are given the option of having their application forwarded to 11 other social landlords who also have rented housing in East Dunbartonshire. These organisations have not adopted the shared allocation policy used by Hillhead HA 2000 and its Common Housing Register* partners. The housing register was due to start operating in May 2007. Further to our on-site inspection period, the date for introduction of the CHR has now been delayed until October 2007.

3.3 Hillhead HA 2000, East Dunbartonshire Council and Antonine Housing Co-operative have a common approach to how they assess and prioritise applications. During 2006, Hillhead HA 2000 reassessed all applications for its housing under the new policy's pointing criteria, as part of its move to the CHR. However, the Association acknowledges that it failed to indicate the negative affect this had for some applicants whose priority points and therefore prospects of being housed, were reduced due to this process. The Association aims to review all applications for housing every two years, on the anniversary of their

* See glossary

receipt. There were 459 applicants on its housing list* at the time of our inspection. The number in March 2006, before it reviewed its housing list*, was 651.

- 3.4 The allocations policy sets out the circumstances in which the Association will cancel an application. These are where the applicant fails to respond to at least two letters from the Association.
- 3.5 Information on how to apply for housing in Hillhead is available on the Association's website, in its office and in the premises of the other social landlords participating in the Common Housing Register*. The Association's staff offer to assist applicants complete the necessarily lengthy form. The Association has access to translation and signing services. Translated copies of the application form, guidance notes and allocation policy can be made available through the Association or East Dunbartonshire Council.
- 3.6 Hillhead HA 2000's office is centrally located within its housing stock. Access to the building and internal facilities are suitable for people with disabilities. However, there is not a hearing loop in its reception or interview room to assist people with hearing problems.
- 3.7 The Association aims to acknowledge receipt of applications for housing within three working days and process them within 20 working days. The latter is not a challenging target and the Association does not always meet it. It does not report its performance in this area to stakeholders. We saw that it could take a long time to place some applicants on its housing list. In these cases, affected applicants face an extended period of uncertainty around the outcome of their application. Meantime, they will not be considered for any tenancies that become available. Performance over November 2006 to February 2007 showed some improvement over what the Association was achieving during the period April to October 2006, when it was carrying out a major review of its housing list. The average time taken to process applications fell from 17.5 to 14.5 days. The proportion of applications dealt with within target increased from 66% to 85%.

* See Glossary

- 3.8 Hillhead HA 2000 provides applicants for housing with good information on the level and range of points they have been awarded. The Association issues fair information on an applicant's prospects of being housed. This is done mainly through its Guide to Applicants. This details the number of vacancies that occurred in the Association's housing during the previous year by size, house type and street. This is a good arrangement but its usefulness is limited without information on factors such as how the Association allocates its houses and number of priority points that are likely to be needed to obtain a tenancy.
- 3.9 The Association's allocation policy includes provision for applications from people with certain categories of immigration status to be suspended* from receiving offers of housing. These provisions do not follow guidance recently issued by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA). Following our on-site inspection period, the Association has subsequently updated its allocation policy and procedures to reflect current guidance. The Association reviews suspended* applicants monthly. A report detailing the numbers and reasons for suspending* applicants is provided to the management committee every six months.
- 3.10 At the time of our inspection the Association had suspended* 10 transfer and 1 external applicant from receiving offers, all due to rent arrears. We reviewed two of these cases and saw that the suspensions* had been applied appropriately. The affected applicants had been advised why they had been suspended from receiving offers of housing and what they could do to have the suspension lifted. However, the suspension letters that had been sent to applicants did not always give information on their right to appeal the decision. Following the on-site period of our inspection this has been rectified and all applicants who are suspended are now notified of their right to appeal.
- 3.11 Hillhead HA 2000 records information on ethnicity and disability from people who apply to it for housing and those it houses. It reports this information to its management committee each year. The low number of ethnic minority households that seek housing from the Association is broadly in line with the mix of ethnicity in the East Dunbartonshire area.

* See glossary

3.12 In summary, the Association has worked well with key partners to develop a common housing register^{*} and shared allocation policy. It is good at promoting access to its housing list. Information it provides to applicants on their prospects of being housed is fair, though limited by the absence of information on how it lets its houses. The Association has a positive approach to dealing with applicants suspended from receiving offers of housing but needs to review provisions dealing with applicants with immigrant status. We identified a number of weaknesses including the time taken to register applications and reporting arrangements in this area, communication with applicants adversely affected when it introduced its revised allocation policy and the absence of information on how to appeal suspensions from receiving offers of housing.

Meeting need and maximising choice

Social landlords should meet housing need through lettings and should maximise choice for applicants.

3.13 Hillhead HA 2000's allocation policy is based on a range of needs that recognise statutory reasonable preference categories*. The Association has an agreed protocol with East Dunbartonshire Council to help both parties meet their duties to homeless people under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The Association received its first three Section 5 referrals* during the onsite period of our inspection. Additionally, the Association has agreed nomination arrangements with East Dunbartonshire Council through which up to 50% of net lets* will be made to people identified by the Council. The proportion of allocations to Council nominees in 2005/006 and 2006/07 was respectively 36.5% and 43% of the Association's lets.

3.14 Hillhead HA 2000 aims to allocate its vacant houses on the basis of its Lettings Plan. The plan is used to control the proportion of lets it makes to three main groups of applicants, namely, Priority, Local, and Other Needs. Based on an expected 100 lets in 2006/07, it planned to allocate 35% to the Priority Group and 65% to other Local Needs groups including tenants whose homes were to be

* See glossary

- demolished and internal transfers. It did not plan to make a specific proportion of its lets available to its Other Needs group.
- 3.15 The 54 lets that the Association made in 2006/07, was far less than the number it had expected. Of properties that became available, 12 (22%) were used to assist its redevelopment programme and 15 (28%) were let to East Dunbartonshire Council nominees, 8 of whom were homeless. A further 7 (13%) were let to transfer tenants and the remaining 20 (37%) to other categories of applicants with housing needs from the Association's list. This included 6 who were homeless. Overall, 46% of allocations went to the Priority Group, 52% to the Local Needs group and 2% to the Other Needs group.
- 3.16 The way the Association records applications for housing, together with the close monitoring of its lets, gives it up to date information on the types of housing need it is meeting through its allocations. However there are no written procedures for deciding which applicant group any particular house allocation should be made to. This is decided by the Housing Manager on an individual allocation basis. This, together with the fact that the Association does not currently explain its Lettings Plan to applicants, means that the way that it lets its houses is not clear. The introduction of the Common Housing Register^{*} and its accompanying new procedures and guidance on how the Association will let its houses, is expected to improve the situation.
- 3.17 Applicants can choose the type of accommodation they wish to be considered for and its location in any number of areas/individual streets. There is no restriction on the number of offers that an applicant may receive. However the Association will meet with them after three refusals in order to reduce the likelihood of further unsuitable offers being made.
- 3.18 We reviewed 15 allocations, all of which had been authorised by a senior member of staff. Successful applicants all had one or more housing needs. The offers of housing met the applicants' preferences and it was possible to see

^{*} See glossary

where higher pointed applicants within the successful applicants' group, had been bypassed and why.

- 3.19 In summary, when letting its housing Hillhead HA 2000 is meeting housing need and giving applicants a good level of choice. Its Lettings Plan is an effective way of ensuring that it is meeting its aims and it has good information on the circumstances of people it is housing. More reported information for applicants on how it operates this plan and on its outcomes is needed to increase transparency on how it allocates housing.

Sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness

Social landlords should maximise security of tenure for all residents of their accommodation, and should work to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness through their delivery of housing management services.

- 3.20 Hillhead HA 2000 had still to sign up around 60 of its tenants to the Scottish Secure Tenancy^{*} agreement (SST) at the time of our inspection. Following legal advice, initially, the Association did not include tenants who it was taking legal action against in the signup procedures. The Association has recently received revised legal guidance to the effect that it can now enter into a new tenancy agreement with tenants in these circumstances. It is now putting measures in place to have all tenants sign SSTs. None of the Association's tenants have Short Scottish Secure Tenancy* (SSST) agreements.
- 3.21 Provision of early, good information and access to appropriate support are important ways in which landlords can help to sustain tenancies. Hillhead HA 2000 attempts to identify vulnerable people when they first apply for housing. Prospective tenants can then be offered appropriate support during their application process and when they take up their tenancy. During a comprehensive tenancy signup procedure, the Association provides new tenants with an excellent information pack. This includes a range of booklets, contact details and a good tenant handbook. A recent survey revealed that 93% of tenants felt the terms of their tenancy had been well explained to them.

* See glossary

- 3.22 The Association can provide or arrange for support in a number of ways. These include:
- at tenancy signup, or earlier if needed, a meeting with the Association's Welfare Rights Officer to discuss eligibility for benefits;
 - regular support visits by the Association's Housing Officers;
 - for tenants aged 16 to 25 years, referral to Project 101; a local support and advice agency, geared to providing help to young people;
 - for tenants of any age, help may be available from East Dunbartonshire Council's Tenancy Support Team;
 - tenants suffering addiction problems may be helped by the Community Addictions Team and in connection with setting up and decorating their home by the FAB Pad Project, partly funded by the Association; and
 - referral to the local Citizens Advice Bureau.
- 3.23 Arrangements to identify any support needs that existing tenants may have, are less well developed, though staff visit their patches regularly which serves to increase the chances of them coming into contact with tenants. Recently introduced, regular, common area inspections in tenement properties adds to this monitoring role, but staff have found it difficult to keep to this arrangement due to other work commitments. Several of the Association's staff members have received specific training on how to recognise people with addictions or mental health support needs. The Association also makes good use of its regular newsletters to encourage tenants to approach it for advice and assistance.
- 3.24 Hillhead HA 2000 has recognised the importance of suitable housing in helping young vulnerable people. It has included in its allocations policy arrangements for additional priority points to be given to young people who have been assessed for any support needs.
- 3.25 The Association aims to visit new tenants in their homes within four weeks of the tenancy start date in order to check for any problems they may be experiencing. It does not monitor and report how well it performs against this target and this is a weakness.

- 3.26 Hillhead HA 2000 tenant population is relatively stable. 10.9% of its stock became empty in 2005/06 and this is close to the national median* for all RSLs, though higher than its peers. The proportion of properties becoming empty in the first six months of year 2006/07 was 7.7%. Turnover in the Association's tenement flats, which are scheduled for demolition and redevelopment, is high compared with their other property types.
- 3.27 The number of tenants abandoning their homes in Hillhead has fluctuated widely in recent years. In 2004/05 the number was 6 or 0.7% of stock, in 2005/06 18, or 2.1% of stock. Five tenants abandoned their homes in the first seven months of 2006/07, representing 0.59% of stock. In peer group organisations, tenants abandoning their homes averaged around 1% in 2004/05 and 2005/06. The Association has not collected information on why these tenants abandoned their homes. It does not know why so many did so in 2005/06 compared to the other periods. The Association feels that more stringent procedures introduced during that period to deal with high levels of rent arrears are likely to be a factor.
- 3.28 We reviewed five cases where the Association had recovered abandoned tenancies. There are clear, comprehensive procedures in place. These are supported by a checklist of required actions, proforma and standard letters, to guide staff. We found that while staff generally followed many aspects of the procedures well, the actions taken, or considered, were not always clearly recorded on the standard documents. It had been appropriate to recover the tenancies in all the cases we reviewed. However, we also saw that the Association was happy to re-establish a tenancy and provide practical assistance, where a tenant made contact with the Association following repossession of their home.
- 3.29 Hillhead HA 2000 issued 148 Notices of Proceedings* (NOPs) in 2005/06, all but 1 due to rent arrears, reflecting past weaknesses in managing tenants' arrears. Numbers reduced to 38 in the first 6 months of 2006/07 following very significant reductions in levels of arrears. The number of houses repossessed or

* See glossary

abandoned by their tenant following court action followed a similar downward trend.

- 3.30 With very few exceptions, Hillhead HA 2000 issues tenants with NOPs by the time two full months rent is owed. Following advice received from its Internal Auditors, on their expiry, NOPs are automatically renewed by the Association provided that this level of arrears remains, even where a tenant is keeping to an arrangement to make regular repayments. While the Association has found this approach effective, good practice recommends that NOP's are issued only when the landlord intends to start legal action.
- 3.31 When taking cases to court Hillhead HA 2000 informs East Dunbartonshire Council so that it can alert its Social Work and Homelessness services. The Association does this again on being granted decree and in advance of any eviction.
- 3.32 The Association has appropriate arrangements to offer a new SST* where it decides not to recover a property after a court order. Generally this is because the tenant has cleared or substantially reduced the outstanding arrears and expenses. This happened on four occasions over 2005/06 and on one occasion during the first seven months of 2006/07.
- 3.33 Hillhead HA 2000 repossesses a high number of houses compared with its peers. While it did not have any repossessions in 2004/05, in the period 2005/06 the number was 22, representing around 2.6% of its stock. This was around twice the rate of its peers. It feels that this is due to effective action it took in 2005-06 to deal with high levels of rent arrears. The high arrears had been caused by its failure to adequately deal with rent arrears in its first year, together with a culture of non payment developed by some of its tenants in the period prior to stock transfer. In 2005/06 the Association granted four new tenancies to tenants it had evicted. The level of legal action and repossessions fell in the first seven months of 2006/07 when eight houses, 0.83% of its stock, were recovered.

* See glossary

- 3.34 Evictions need to be approved by the Association's management committee on the recommendation of the Director. The management committee require that they are given suitably detailed reports providing the history of the case including the actions taken to resolve it before, during and after taking legal action to repossess. This is a good way of monitoring the repossession procedures and we saw cases where the management committee decided to continue cases rather than approve recommendations to repossess properties. While reports are designed to protect the identity of tenants, they could be improved in this area by providing less detailed information on family composition. Following our inspection the Association has amended its reporting format to ensure that the identity of tenants cannot be established.
- 3.35 In summary, Hillhead HA 2000 provides good information to tenants and it has fair arrangements to identify and support those who may be vulnerable. The number of houses that it repossesses because of rent arrears is reducing and it is clearly reluctant to follow this course of action, unless as a final resort. It handles legal action well and manages post decree occupancy correctly, however it needs to be sure that it is using NOPs* appropriately in all cases.

Quality of neighbourhoods

Social landlords should deliver services to ensure that neighbourhoods are attractive, well maintained and safe places to live. They should deal appropriately with antisocial behaviour.

- 3.36 Hillhead HA 2000's housing was obtained from East Dunbartonshire Council in 2004 in a large scale stock transfer following a ballot of tenants. The Association is currently building the first phase of its new homes which will eventually replace all of its tenement flats.
- 3.37 Inspectors and the Tenant Assessor* visited a number of the Association's housing areas. The environment in the estate is generally fair and there are examples of tenants in terraced or semi-detached properties maintaining their gardens to a high standard.

* See glossary

3.38 Conditions around the tenement flats we saw were nearly always unsatisfactory in the opinion of our Inspectors and Tenant Assessor. Common closes were in a poor physical and decorative condition, due to lack of maintenance and because they were not being cleaned. Garden areas were generally untended. The Association has not issued more than very broad guidance on the standard of cleanliness and tidiness it wants to see. Litter and bulk rubbish that had been there for some time was often present around and within the tenement closes and areas of open ground. This problem was worsened by the local Council's decision in 2006 to introduce charges for household bulk uplifts. Controlled door entry systems, important to restrict unwanted unauthorised entry to blocks, were very often not working. There were also examples of poorly maintained areas of common ground around former lockup garage areas. These also contributed to the poor environment in some areas. These problems were frequently referred to by tenants that we spoke to during our on-site inspection period. We saw that while the Association had contacted individual tenants or groups of tenants on these issues, it was having great difficulty in improving matters.

3.39 Neighbour disputes and antisocial behaviour are significant issues in Hillhead, particularly in its tenement flats. The Association has identified that while there are relatively few complaints from tenants in tenement flats, these are locations where more serious antisocial problems often occur. The Association told us that this may be because tenants are apprehensive about reporting complaints, particularly where these are of a serious nature or involve criminal behaviour. Our observations while on site at Hillhead confirmed this is likely to be a factor. While we were on site we saw two tenants, both flat dwellers, terminate their tenancies because of serious antisocial behaviour directed towards them. These tenants' feared reprisals and saw little prospect of the problems they were experiencing being satisfactorily dealt with by the Association or other local agencies. Given the significance of this issue for service users, the Association needs to give this area greater priority. In the past the Association has been unable to obtain evidence that would allow it pursue a recovery action or Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO) in any of the serious antisocial behaviour cases it has investigated.

3.40 The Association received 89 complaints about nuisance and antisocial behaviour in 2006/07. Numbers in 2004/05 and 2005/06 were 88 and 83 respectively. Complaints are recorded by type from twenty five categories. A limited range of information on complaints is reported to the Management Committee bi-monthly. More information on the nature of complaints being received, where they came from, on trends and on outcomes would help the Association to improve its monitoring in this area of its work.

3.41 Staff dealing with complaints are guided by a set of procedures. However, these do not include enough information on matters such as:-

- timescales for actions;
- communication with and support for complainants;
- evidence gathering; and
- methods of liaison with other agencies such as the local police, East Dunbartonshire Antisocial Behaviour Team, Community Safety Officers and Weekend Noise Team.

The Association has entered into an information sharing protocol with other members of the Community Safety Group. There are examples of good joint working on antisocial behaviour issues but overall this is an area that needs to be further developed by the Association and its partners.

3.42 Case reviews that we carried out on nuisance or antisocial behaviour complaints showed they were attended to reasonably quickly by the Association and generally, a resolution was achieved.

3.43 The Association has developed several ways of encouraging tenants to behave responsibly and to help it to identify potential problems at an early stage. These include;

- inviting tenants to enter into a good neighbour charter at the start of their tenancy;
- an annual best garden competition;
- good use of its quarterly newsletter to inform tenants about nuisance and antisocial behaviour issues;

- a tenant loyalty scheme with quarterly cash prize for tenants meeting tenancy conditions;
- seasonal garden inspections; and
- employing an estate caretaker to carry out environmental cleanups and help tenants clear discarded household goods.

3.44 The Association introduced monthly common close and garden ground inspections of its flatted properties at the end of 2006. These had not been fully implemented at the time of our inspection due to its staff's other work commitments.

3.45 In summary, the environment in many of Hillhead HA 2000's housing areas is poor. This is particularly so within those tenement blocks that are scheduled for demolition and redevelopment over the next few years. The Association has procedures to deal with antisocial behaviour and it has introduced initiatives to encourage responsible behaviour. However partnership working, necessary to deal with more serious cases, is not sufficiently developed. This is a weakness particularly given the significant impact upon service users.

Responsiveness to tenants

Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities. They should ensure that tenants are informed of and involved in decisions that affect the service they receive.

3.46 Hillhead HA 2000 is required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to publish a tenant consultation strategy. The Act also requires landlords to inform and consult tenants about changes to its services and take tenants' views into account when making decisions that will affect them. Hillhead HA 2000 has met its statutory obligation to publish a strategy. We looked at Hillhead HA 2000's approach to consulting tenants on proposed policy and service changes. We found that the Association had experienced problems in this area due to the absence of any tenant organisations in its area and limited levels of interest from its tenants. It is continuing its work with the Tenant Participation Advisory Services (TPAS) in order to make contact with hard to reach groups. The Association has made good use of its quarterly tenant newsletter and has held

- open days locally concerning its new build programme in an effort to involve tenants and potential tenants in what it is doing. These measures have not been very successful. Decision papers presented to the management committee therefore only rarely include information on tenant's views that would contribute to consideration of proposed changes to policies or service charge levels.
- 3.47 The Association was however able to take tenants views into account in a limited way when deciding on the 2007/08 rent increase. It used a consultation form included with its December 2006 newsletter to ask for feedback on its proposal to increase rent levels in March 2007. It received eight replies and the nature of these responses was reported in summary form to the Management Committee in early February. The Association was unable to individually reply to the tenants who had commented since in order to encourage responses, it did not ask for the tenant's identity. The rent increase was confirmed in the Association's March 2007 newsletter and in a letter sent to each tenant of the Association.
- 3.48 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 has a comprehensive complaints policy. The complaints procedure is publicised in leaflets available in the Association's offices, in the Tenant Handbook and in its regular tenant newsletter. During 2005/06 the Association received six complaints about matters connected with its housing management services. We looked at the way the Association dealt with a number of complaints and saw that its approach was positive.
- 3.49 The Association has recently set up a Customer Care Working Group to look at ways of improving the service to tenants. The group comprises tenants and Management Committee members. The group is new and therefore at present, it is difficult to estimate the impact it will have on the delivery of housing management services.
- 3.50 In summary, the Association has shown that it wants to be responsive to tenants. Its efforts to engage with tenants to date have not been very successful; however the Customer Care Working Group that it has recently set up shows promise in this area of its work.

Is the service managed for improvement?

Resource management and efficiency

Social landlords should maximise their income in a way that is fair to service users, and manage costs effectively.

3.51 Hillhead HA 2000 tenants can pay their rent at some local post offices and shops, the method preferred by eight out ten tenants; by bank standing order or by cheque at its office. In the Association's recent Tenant Survey, 93% of respondents found arrangements for paying their rent fairly or very convenient.

3.52 The table below summarises Hillhead HA 2000's reported performance in collecting rent.

	At March 2005	At March 2006			April- Sept 2007
	Hillhead HA 2000	Hillhead HA 2000	Peer group	National median	Hillhead HA 2000
Total arrears as % of total gross rental income	18.77%	11.82%	5.9%	5.2%	10.77%
Total current arrears as % of total gross rental income	9.01%	4.5%	4.2%	4%	3.22%
Current arrears (non technical) as % of total gross rental income	8.91%	4.49%	3.2%	2.8%	3.27%
Current arrears (technical) as % of total gross rental income	0.09%	0.01%	1%	0.8%	-0.06%
% of current tenants in serious arrears**	5.9%	5.76%	6.9%	3.9%	2.88%
Total former tenant arrears	£151,508***	£155,414***	-	-	£164,874***
As % of total gross rental income	9.76%	7.33%	1.8%	1%	7.55%
Rent arrears written off	£845	£23,137	-	-	£7,275

** Owing more than 13 weeks rent and >£250

***Includes former tenant arrears at time of stock transfer (see para 3.54 below)

3.53 Existing tenants at Hillhead started with a clear rent account when the Association came into being in June 2004. Rent arrears of around £165,000 owed to the former landlord, East Dunbartonshire Council, were treated as former tenant arrears to be collected by the Association. These have not been dealt with as a priority by Hillhead, however the Association has recovered around 30% of this debt at the time of our inspection.

* See glossary

- 3.54 Former tenant arrears owed to the Association, that is, arrears of rent that fell due after June 2004, amounts to £50,200 or 2.3% of annual gross rental income. This is high when compared with Hillhead HA 2000's peers and the national median* for all RSLs. The Association has written off £31,246 of irrecoverable former tenant rent arrears during the period June 2004 to September 2006.
- 3.55 There is a clear procedure for dealing with former tenant arrears including criteria for writing off arrears that it is impractical to recover. The Association has not actively pursued payment of this debt. It has employed a tracing agent to confirm debtors' addresses so that where appropriate it can more positively seek repayment.
- 3.56 In 2005 the Association revised its rent arrears procedures and increased staff resources in the areas of benefits advice and arrears management. This has resulted in good progress in reducing the level of current tenant arrears. The figure at September 2006 was 3.28% of gross rental income. This is below the Association's reasonably challenging target of 4%. The percentage of tenants with serious arrears, has also been reduced from 5.9% at March 2005 to 2.88% at September 2006.
- 3.57 The Association has developed effective procedures for managing current tenant arrears. These include positive work to increase the income of tenants in Hillhead principally through its employment of a Welfare Rights Officer. Through its recording and reporting arrangements the Association has been able to demonstrate that, to date, this temporary post has been cost effective in bringing about an increase in tenant's incomes.
- 3.58 The table below summarises Hillhead HA 2000's reported performance in letting houses that have become empty:

* See glossary

	2004-05	2005-06			April –Sept 2007
	Hillhead HA 2000	Hillhead HA 2000	Peer Group	National Median	Hillhead HA 2000
Rental income lost due to empty houses	£10,286	£34,766	-	-	£34,872
As % of total rental income	0.70%	1.64%	1.6%	0.9%	1.6%
Total no. of re-lets*	44	74	-	-	33
% re-let in <2 weeks	22.7%	9.46%	33.5%	39.1%	3%
% re-let in 2-4 weeks	40.9%	28.38%	25%	24%	15%
% re-let in >4 weeks	36.4%	62.16%	41.4%	36.6%	82%
Average time to re-let (days)	26	42	34	25	55.82

Source: APSR 2004/05. Inspection Submission

3.59 The Association's procedures for re-letting properties include a number of positive steps aimed at minimising delays. These include:

- giving clear information to tenants on terminating their tenancies;
- pre and post termination inspections;
- early identification of prospective new tenants and pre-allocating houses where possible;
- setting targets for the time involved in the main stages of the letting process; and
- regular monitoring of all aspects of the re-letting process by Housing Officers and senior staff.

3.60 Hillhead HA 2000 has an overall target of 25 days to re-let* properties. It is not meeting its target and although performance deteriorated it is more recently showing signs of improvement. Its 26 day average re-let time in 2004/05 rose to 42 days in 2005/06 and to 55.82 days in the first half of 2006/07. However by the end of March 2007 this figure had fallen back to 47 days. Recent changes in how the Association selects applicants for voids and in how it records and monitors the voids process is intended to improve its performance in this area. It is too early to gauge how effective these measures will be. The Association's performance in 2005/06 was not as good as that of peer group organisations and

* See glossary

the national median for all RSLs. The Association's loss in rental income because of empty houses was 1.64% in 2005/06; close to that of its peers, but much higher than the national median. However performance is much better when the impact of lost rent from empty homes pending demolition is taken out. When the impact of these properties is removed, the Association's rent loss at the end of March 2007 is 0.67%.

- 3.61 Hillhead HA 2000's costs for delivering its housing management services; £501 per property in 2005/06, were expected to rise to £532 in 2006/07. Its costs in 2005/06 were considerably less than both the peer group average* of £600 per property and the national average of £640.
- 3.62 In summary, Hillhead HA 2000's overall performance in maximising rental income is fair. Although the Association has some positive procedures in place to minimise time taken to re-let its houses, performance outcomes are poor and deteriorating. The Association's revised rent arrears procedures have reversed an upward trend in the total amount owed and the number of serious arrears cases. The Association's performance in this area is now within its target range and this is positive. It has still to deal effectively with its own former tenants arrears.

Performance management

Social landlords should have clear objectives, standards and targets for housing management services, should monitor achievement of those and should work to continuously improve services.

- 3.63 Hillhead Housing Association 2000's current Internal Management Plan* (IMP) includes business and operational objectives. It also contains specific 2006/07 performance targets for the housing management service. These targets cover most of the key operational areas of housing management.
- 3.64 The Association have an effective approach to performance monitoring and reporting. Regular detailed reports on performance are provided to the Association's Management Committee and Housing Management Sub

* See glossary

Committee. These include comparative performance figures from other RSLs involved in its benchmarking* club.

- 3.65 The Association has produced policies and procedures to assist staff in the delivery of the service, though some gaps have been identified during the inspection.
- 3.66 In summary, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 has a good performance management structure in housing management and is clearly committed to continuous improvement. The Association is using the information available to improve the service provided to service users.

Grade and overall assessment of housing management

- 3.67 Our overall assessment is that Hillhead HA 2000's housing management service is fair. The award of this grading in the early stage of the organisation's development reflects a relatively good level of achievement in a short space of time. The Association has some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses. We set out below the key factors we have taken account of in coming to our overall assessment.
- 3.68 Hillhead HA 2000's key strengths are:-
- good work in developing the common housing register and shared allocation policy which will provide good access its housing list;
 - it is housing people in need;
 - the extensive range of information provided to tenants and prospective tenants; and
 - it has made good progress in reducing rent arrears.
- 3.69 The Association has a number of areas where there are weaknesses or where improvement is required:-

* See glossary

- the environment in many of its housing areas, particularly in the common closes and around the vicinity of tenement blocks is poor. While these flats are scheduled for future demolition, the impact upon service users is significant;
- partnership working needed to deal with more serious antisocial behaviour is underdeveloped;
- the time taken to process applications is not consistent and may be lengthy in some instances;
- provide transparency on how the Association allocates its housing by providing information on how it operates its Lettings Plan and on the outcomes achieved;
- monitoring and reporting of performance against targets for settling in visits for new tenants;
- use of NOP's* only in appropriate circumstances; and
- performance in the time taken to re-let* houses is poor.

* See glossary

4. Property maintenance

4.1 The grade awarded for property maintenance is:

C	Fair	Some strengths, but with many areas where improvement is required or with a small number of significant weaknesses.
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We explain at the end of this section how the assessments and judgements we have made result in this grade.

Access to the repairs service

Social landlords should have arrangements in place that make it easy for tenants to report repairs and to have them carried out.

- 4.2 Hillhead Housing Association 2000's responsive repairs* service is accessible. Tenants can report repairs by phone, in writing, by email or by calling in person at the office. Association staff approached while about the estate will also note repairs reported to them by tenants. The Association do not record or monitor the methods used by tenants to access the repair service. It is therefore not able to identify the level of contact across the range of various access methods available to tenants.
- 4.3 The Association operates an accessible out of hours emergency repairs service. A freephone number is available which tenants can use to report emergency repairs direct to the Association's contractor out with office hours and at weekends.
- 4.4 The Association gives tenants advice on how to report repairs in its Tenant Handbook, on the Association's website and in their quarterly tenant newsletter. In addition, the Association provide a good range of leaflets on its repairs service. Hillhead Housing Association 2000 can provide information in other languages and formats, if requested and it advertises this service. However information on the translation service is not included in the Tenant Handbook. In a recent survey carried out by the Association 96% of tenants who responded found it easy to report a repair.

* See glossary

- 4.5 The Association provides tenants with a written receipt for all reported repairs. This confirms the work to be undertaken, the contractor and the target date for completion of the repair. However, the receipt does not confirm the priority category of the repair or indicate if it qualifies under the Right to Repair* scheme. This is a significant weakness. However Hillhead advised us that it is intending to review the receipt issued to tenants to include information on the Right to Repair*.
- 4.6 The Association does not operate a formal repairs appointment system. Staff currently provide the contractors with details of tenants' preferred access times.
- 4.7 The Association is a member of Clyde Housing Connections*, a group of RSLs within the Dunbartonshire area that has formed a consortium and has a common website address. Tenants with access to the internet can use this service to report repairs via the Association's website. The repairs section of the website provides tenants with access to report repairs and to the relevant leaflets, policies and procedures.
- 4.8 In summary, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 provides fair access to its repairs service. The Association needs to make improvements to the service as it fails to advise tenants about their statutory rights under the Right to Repair* legislation.

Speed and quality of response repairs service

Social landlords should set challenging targets for completing repairs, strive to achieve them and ensure repairs are completed to a high quality.

- 4.9 Hillhead Housing Association 2000's target for emergency repairs is to respond within 3 hours and to complete within 24 hours. This can be compared with the sector median to complete within 6 hours. Its urgent repairs require completion within five working days which is less challenging than the sector median of three days. The Association's target for routine repairs is 20 days and the sector median is 10 days. The responsive repair targets set by the terms of the

* See glossary

Association's transfer contract are not particularly challenging when compared to other organisations in the sector.

4.10 The table below outlines the Association's reported performance for completing response repairs over the last three financial years.

	Hillhead Housing Association target for completion	Performance				
		2004/05	2005/06	2006/07*	National median 2005/06	RSL peer group 2005/06
Emergency Repairs	24 hours	93.2	98.4	98.9	98.8%	98%
Urgent Repairs	5 working days	67.4	81.1	86.5	95.7%	94%
Routine Repairs	20 working days	71.2	87.2	90.9	95.5%	92%

Source: APSR and Hillhead Housing Association 2000's Inspection Submission
*As of 31 October 2006

4.11 The figures provided by the Association are not reliable for the following reasons:

- The Association does not record the actual time tenants report repairs or the exact time the contractor completes the repairs. Therefore there is no evidence available to confirm the number of emergency repairs completed within 24 hours.
- Some routine repairs will be pre-inspected* and the date recorded is the generation of the works order and not the date when the tenant reported the repair.

4.12 Since the transfer of the houses to the Association in 2004, its performance in carrying out responsive repairs has steadily improved and tenants are now receiving a significantly better service. However when compared to other housing providers, whose targets are more challenging, the Association's performance is below average for dealing with urgent and routine repairs. This is a weakness. The majority of tenants, 50% of those interviewed during our inspection, advised us that they felt the quality of the responsive repairs service was staying the same. However 39% of tenants felt the service had improved over the last two

* See glossary

years. The Association's own recent survey of tenants found that 62% of respondents were either very or fairly satisfied with the responsive repairs service provided.

- 4.13 Pre and post inspections* are important tools for making sure that repairs are targeted accurately and carried out to a high standard. The Association's target for pre-inspections and post inspections is between 10% and 15%. During 2005/06 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 completed pre-inspections for 13.93% of its ordered repairs and post inspected 9.43%.
- 4.14 The Association does not operate an effective Right to Repair* scheme and this is a failure in statutory compliance. Right to Repair is not covered by the Association's current Maintenance Policy. When tenants report repairs, the Association advise them verbally if it is a qualifying repair but do not issue the necessary written confirmation. The Association does not maintain a list of alternative contractors. The Tenants Handbook and leaflets available at the reception area of the Association's office provide tenants with information on how the Right to Repair scheme operates. The Association does not record or monitor how many qualifying repairs are issued. Therefore it does not have the necessary information on when it should compensate its tenants in the event of a target timescale for a qualifying repair being missed.
- 4.15 In summary, the Association provides a fair responsive repairs service. There are weaknesses in its recording of its responsive repairs, its performance and its failure to meet its statutory obligations on the Right to Repair.

Physical quality of houses

Social landlords should have good information about the condition of their houses and should deliver effective maintenance programmes that take account of housing quality and home safety needs.

- 4.16 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all social landlords' houses should meet the new Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)* by 2015. Landlords were to complete a plan showing how they will achieve this by April 2005. Communities

* See glossary

Scotland assessed and approved the Association's Standard Delivery Plan (SDP). This demonstrated the Association's ability to meet the SHQS by 2015.

- 4.17 The Association currently holds stock information from a stock condition survey carried out, pre-transfer, in 1998. It is on this information that the Association based its original business planning and SDP assumptions. The Association does not hold full stock condition information on its IT system. However, it is using routine maintenance information and inspections to update its stock condition information. The Association is also planning to carry out a further stock condition survey with the results being used to update the current information.
- 4.18 The Association included in the original business plan a programme for improvements to its houses. However, the Association has made a change to this programme and did not consult with its tenants regarding the change. The Association has completed Phase 1 and 2 of internal improvements to its retained, non-tenemental stock. This included the installation of new kitchens, bathrooms and internal doors in 81 properties. Phase 3 is scheduled to start within the current financial year, 2007/08. The Association regularly advises tenants of the proposed investment programme through the Tenant Newsletter.
- 4.19 However, the Association has not as yet, carried out any cyclical maintenance* works since the transfer of the houses in 2004. During the on site period our Tenant Assessor* highlighted the poor external condition of the houses. This lack of routine maintenance represents a weakness as there is evidence that a large number of houses require external repair works. The Association recognises that it needs to start its cyclical programme in order that it can improve in this area and safeguard its investment in internal improvements.
- 4.20 There are hard wired smoke alarms in 27.5% of the Association's stock and 72.5% have battery operated smoke alarms. The Association plans to upgrade the battery smoke alarms within the next five years. Currently, the Association does not regularly inspect smoke alarms. Information presently held by the Association indicates that there is no lead piping serving its properties. Following

* See glossary

the outcome of the proposed stock condition survey, the Association will update the current information database and schedule any necessary replacement pipework.

- 4.21 All of the Association’s tenemental stock has door entry systems installed. The condition of the systems is very poor and the majority of installations do not function. The door entry systems are not included in the Association’s proposed cyclical maintenance* programme. While these properties are scheduled for future demolition, this represents a weakness given its impact upon service users.
- 4.22 Social landlords are required to carry out safety checks every 12 months on all gas appliances and flues which they provide for tenants’ use. We found that the Association has not fully met its statutory duty for a small number of its houses. Following a report by its Internal Auditor it has reviewed its procedures to address the weaknesses identified. The following table summarises Hillhead Housing Association 2000’s performance in this area.

	October 2006	
	Number of houses	%
Houses with gas appliances	747	
Houses with current gas safety certificates	746	99.87%
Houses where safety check was carried out within 12 months of previous check	715	95.72%
Houses where safety check was up to 1 month late	23	3.08%
Houses where safety check was between 1 and 3 months late	7	0.94%
Houses where safety check was more than 3 months late	1	0.13%

- 4.23 The Association approved its Gas Servicing Policy in November 2006, which took account of the recommendations from the Internal Audit report carried out earlier that year. The Association altered the start date of the process of carrying out gas safety checks to eleven months after the last service date. In instances where there have been previous problems with access, the Association starts the gas servicing process within a 10 month period. We also saw that the

* See glossary

Association now takes prompt legal action with tenants where access problems have previously occurred. The Association holds details of the contractor's personnel and check that all operatives carrying out the checks put their CORGI Registration Number on the gas safety certificate. Our case reviews confirmed that the Association is following its new procedures and effectively monitoring its performance. The Association also arranges to have a sample 10% quality assurance check of gas safety work carried out by an independent contractor. Hillhead Housing Association 2000 is not meeting its statutory obligations in all cases. However, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 now has in place new procedures and this is resulting in improvements in its monitoring of gas safety.

- 4.24 From 2004 social landlords have a statutory duty to manage asbestos in the common areas of their properties. Prior to the transfer of the stock in 2004, East Dunbartonshire Council had commissioned a report to identify the properties that contained asbestos. The Association has used this information to develop an Asbestos Register and Asbestos Management Plan. The Association is aware of the types of asbestos present and follows procedures on any necessary actions. It informs its tenants and its contractors of the presence of asbestos before work is started. The Association is working to comply with the regulations.
- 4.25 The Association has a lettable standard which staff use when deciding on repairs works to void properties. The standard aims to ensure that the houses it lets are safe and in a good condition. While on site we viewed a number of void properties and noted that the decoration standard was poor. The Association has a policy to pay new tenants a decoration allowance for voids where properties are in a poor condition. To date the Association has only paid one decoration allowance.
- 4.26 The Association has a target of ten working days for its maintenance section to bring its void properties up to its standard. Our case reviews confirmed that the Association carries out void inspections and order any necessary repairs in line with procedures. Any failures to meet target dates we encountered were all due to the late return of keys from the Association's contractor. This is in line with the reported performance on repairs to voids.

4.27 In summary, the Association's performance in this area is fair. The Association recognises that it needs to update the information it holds on the condition of its stock and revise its investment programme and financial budgets accordingly. The Association has not carried out any cyclical maintenance* to its properties since the date of transfer and it is not maintaining its door entry systems. The Association is now effectively monitoring gas safety requirements and complying with its asbestos management duties.

Responsiveness to tenants

Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities.

4.28 The Association routinely collects feedback from tenants on reactive repairs and planned maintenance works. The Association collects feedback on individual repairs through a postal questionnaire sent to tenants along with the repairs receipt. To encourage tenants to return these, there is a monthly prize draw for all tenants who have completed questionnaires. The Association has recently agreed to routinely send stamped addressed envelopes with repair receipts and survey forms to make it easier for tenants to return completed questionnaires.

4.29 The Association also collects feedback from its tenants following its planned maintenance contracts. The Association use the results to improve the service provided to tenants in future phases. Tenants in a previous contract had positively commented on the use of a pilot flat to provide an opportunity for tenants to see the quality and choice of new fitments. It is the Association's intention, where possible, to provide a similar initiative in all future phases.

4.30 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 has a comprehensive complaints policy. The complaints procedure is publicised in leaflets available in the Association's offices, in the Tenants Handbook and in its regular Tenant Newsletter. We looked at a number of complaints about the property maintenance service and those demonstrated that the Association had a good approach to dealing with complaints. We could see evidence that the Association use complaint outcomes to improve its services.

* See glossary

- 4.31 The Association has recently set up a Customer Care Working Group to look at ways of improving the service to tenants. The group comprises tenants and Management Committee members. It met recently to consider proposed changes to the target timescales for the responsive repairs service. The Association asked its tenants in the recent Tenants Survey for views on repairs timescales and these confirm that the revised timescales are within tenants' expectations for the new contract. The group is new and therefore, at present, it is difficult to estimate the impact it will have on the delivery of the property maintenance service.
- 4.32 In summary, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 is good at responding to service users' views. There is a commitment by the Association to seek the views of tenants regarding its property maintenance service.

Is the service managed for improvement?

Resource management and efficiency

Social landlords should manage the cost of their services effectively and procure repairs and maintenance services in a way that takes account of quality.

- 4.33 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 spent £329 per house providing repairs and maintenance services in 2005-06. This figure is significantly higher than both the national median* of £260 per house, and national average* of £270.
- 4.34 The Association has a pre-transfer agreement with East Dunbartonshire Council's "Connect Services" to carry out its gas servicing and repairs, responsive repair work and landscape maintenance for at least a three-year period after the date of transfer. As this arrangement concludes in June 2007, the Association is currently reviewing its responsive repairs contract. The Association lets most of its other contracts using "Balancing Quality and Price" tendering procedures. The Association negotiated a Partnering Agreement* for Phase 2 of the improvement works to its retained houses.

* See glossary

- 4.35 The Association carries out, on average, around 10% monthly post inspections on completed repairs. It can therefore effectively assess the quality of service provided by its contractor and monitor if it is receiving value for money.
- 4.36 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 has good procedures in place to process rechargeable repairs. During our inspection, we reviewed a number of cases and concluded that the Association is following procedures and issuing invoices within agreed timescales. There has been limited success in collection and the recovery rate is approximately 8%. The Association use the services of a debt collecting agency for outstanding debts.
- 4.37 In summary, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 has a good approach to procurement in repairs and is currently planning the tender process for its responsive repairs contract. It has good procedures for recharging repairs and it uses post inspections to ensure that it achieves value for money.

Performance management

Social landlords should have clear objectives, standards and targets for property maintenance services, should monitor achievement of these, and should work to continuously improve services.

- 4.38 Hillhead Housing Association 2000's current Internal Management Plan* (IMP) includes business and operational objectives. It also contains specific 2006/07 performance targets for the property maintenance service. These targets cover most of the key operational areas of property maintenance. Timelines are provided for business objectives and quarterly reports confirm how far the Association has been successful in meeting the objective and if it is within the agreed timescale.
- 4.39 The Association have an effective approach to performance monitoring and reporting. Regular detailed reports on performance are provided to the Association's Management Committee and Maintenance Sub Committee. These include comparative performance figures from other RSLs involved in its benchmarking club*. Details of service user satisfaction and feedback are also

* See glossary

incorporated. However, as indicated in paragraph 4.11 some of the reported performance in responsive repairs completion times may be inaccurate.

- 4.40 The Association has produced policies and procedures to assist staff in the delivery of the service. There is a gap in the current maintenance policy regarding the Right to Repair^{*} and the review of its maintenance policy is overdue. The Association is currently preparing tender documents for its responsive repairs contract. The outcomes from the current review of the maintenance policy should be fully reflected in the proposed tender documentation.
- 4.41 In summary, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 has a fair performance management structure in repairs. The Association is using the information available to improve the property maintenance service.

Grade and overall assessment of property maintenance

- 4.42 Our overall assessment is that Hillhead Housing Association 2000's property maintenance service is fair. The award of this grading in the early stage of the organisation's development reflects a relatively good level of achievement in a short space of time. We found strengths in the service, along with some weaknesses. The Association is aware of its strengths and weaknesses in property maintenance. We set out below the key factors we have taken into account in coming to our overall assessment.
- 4.43 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 has a number of strengths in its property maintenance service. Performance in carrying out reactive repairs within its published target timescales has improved steadily in the last three years. The Association is committed to seeking the views of tenants on the quality of its property maintenance service. The Association has also a good approach to procurement and has good procedures in place for recharging repairs.

^{*} See glossary

- 4.44 The Association has a number of areas for improvement, which include:
- the Association must meet its statutory obligations on the Right to Repair*;
 - despite making improvements in performance for responsive repairs over the past three years, the Association's performance is poor for responsive repairs against targets that are not challenging;
 - the Association has not carried out any cyclical maintenance* on its houses since the transfer of the stock;
 - its door entry systems are not operating and this is impacting on tenants' security and quality of life;
 - the Association do not have reliable performance figures for responsive repairs; and
 - continuing its good progress in order to fully meet its statutory duties in relation to the management of gas safety testing.

* See glossary

5. Governance and financial management

Leadership and direction

A clear vision or purpose and an inclusive, well-informed planning process are key to effectively delivering the services that tenants want.

- 5.1 Hillhead's activities are directed and controlled by the Association's Management Committee. Its members have a strong awareness of the issues and challenges facing the Association and demonstrate a clear understanding of its purpose and future direction.
- 5.2 The Association's current Internal Management Plan* (IMP) covers the period 2005 to 2008. The plan gives details of the organisation's mission statement and organisational aims. Following a STEP (Social, Technological, Economic and Political) assessment, the document demonstrates a good appreciation of the Association's operating environment.
- 5.3 The plan is regularly reviewed by all staff and Management Committee members at their annual "away day". At this event, business and operational objectives, together with performance targets, are agreed for the year. All of the present 14 objectives are SMART* (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) with progress reported quarterly to the Management Committee. Specific tasks, contributing to each objective, are developed and clearly cross referenced to the organisational aim involved. These tasks are collected to form Team Plans which are supported by agreed Personal Objectives for individual staff members. A comprehensive performance appraisal system is in place for staff, clearly linked to individual Training and Development Plans.

Clear functions and proper control

Social landlords should be clear about the functions of the governing body, and take informed, transparent decisions within a framework of controls.

- 5.4 Hillhead's Management Committee has a clear understanding of its role and works constructively with staff members. The Management Committee meets ten times over the course of the year, with reports and minutes received from all

* See glossary

Sub-Committees. The role and conduct of the Management Committee is defined in its Standing Orders. Clear, written remits are in place for all Sub-Committees; namely, Housing Management, Maintenance, Development, Audit and Health and Safety. There have been no inquorate meetings over the last twelve months.

5.5 Sub Committees receive an extensive range of bi monthly reports covering all of the Association's activities. The Management Committee is presented with key performance reports on progress across key business objectives for the year. These include quarterly performance reports on housing management and property maintenance. The performance reports to committee provide a good level of detail with:

- comparison of actual performance against targets;
- details of other similar landlords' performance involved in their benchmarking club;
- analysis of trends; and
- service user satisfaction information.

5.6 The Association's reports on proposed legal action for rent arrears confirm that appropriate actions have been taken to manage the arrears. However, we found that details of the tenants' household such as age and gender were included and this is considered inappropriate and a potential breach of confidentiality. We also saw evidence that sensitive documents were being copied and circulated to Committee members while still containing details of tenants' names and addresses.

Developing capacity

Social landlords should ensure their governing bodies have the skills and experience they need to perform well, develop their capacity and evaluate their performance.

5.7 The Association's Management Committee currently has ten members, drawn from four categories of representation:

- tenants of the Association - four members;
- local community representatives - two members;

- local businesses and professional community - two members, including one co-optee; and
 - local elected members nominated by East Dunbartonshire Council - two members.
- 5.8 A recent vacancy for a representative of local businesses and professional community was filled following an advertisement in the local press. The advert and associated application form highlighted the skills and experience needed by prospective applicants. After an interview involving the Chair and Director, the successful applicant was invited to join the Management Committee of the Association as a co-optee meantime, pending formal election at the next Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- 5.9 Hillhead's Management Committee members have a wide range of skills and experience, which they use effectively to guide and control the Association's activities at a strategic level. The Association have a positive attitude to supporting Committee members in developing their skills and knowledge.
- 5.10 Prospective new members are given opportunities to attend meetings of the Committee prior to joining. An induction session involving the Chairperson and Director is carried out using a standard checklist. A comprehensive induction pack is provided for new Committee Members.
- 5.11 Following every AGM, Committee Members complete a self assessment of their individual skills, knowledge and training needs. These are developed into Training Plans for each Committee Member. Thereafter, these are integrated, along with staff plans, into the Corporate Training Plan for the year. Committee Members we interviewed confirmed that they were very satisfied with the training and development opportunities provided by the Association.
- 5.12 There is a good awareness among members of the Committee's strengths and weaknesses. Following regular annual reviews of its effectiveness, measures are introduced to improve the effectiveness of Committee's operation.

Accountability

Engaging stakeholders, public reporting and making accountability real.

5.13 A strong membership and good levels of participation are important ways for a landlord to demonstrate accountability. Hillhead allows a broad range of people to become members of the Association and makes efforts to effectively promote membership by:

- membership leaflets available at the reception area of its office;
- staff at new tenancy sign ups;
- Hillhead's Tenant Handbook;
- the Association's website; and
- regular items in its quarterly newsletter for tenants promoting membership generally.

5.14 The Association's membership level has increased steadily since the transfer of stock into its ownership in 2004. At the time of our inspection Hillhead had 67 members, 43, or 64%, of whom were tenants. Membership of the Association and AGMs are important ways for Hillhead to be accountable to its tenants and service users, particularly given that it has not yet achieved a high level of participation in other ways. In addition to formal member notification, the Association advertises its AGM through its website and tenants' newsletter. The meeting is held locally in the Association's offices; however, few further measures are taken to encourage member's attendance. Hillhead's last two AGMs have been attended by around 20% of its members. This is however only equivalent to 12 members, 10 of whom form the Management Committee.

5.15 Presently, Hillhead has nine elected committee members and one member has been co-opted. The Association have recently made further efforts to ensure that their committee representation better reflects its local community. It has:

- changed its constitution and rules to increase the number of Management Committee places available to tenants;
- included in its tenant newsletters items seeking more tenant Committee members;

- promoted Management Committee membership by making leaflets available at the reception area of its offices;
 - secured funding and is working with Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) in efforts to engage with young people in the Hillhead area; and
 - promoted tenant involvement through Working Groups, as potentially, a first step to recruiting further tenant Management Committee members.
- 5.16 Hillhead is keen to provide opportunities for tenants to influence its activities and thereby, demonstrate greater accountability. It has a comprehensive Tenant Participation and Consultation Policy in place. Appended to this is the 2006/07 Tenant Participation Action Plan. The Association has invested heavily in its efforts to engage with tenants and service users, but with limited success to date.
- 5.17 Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work and be responsive to their views and priorities. Hillhead does not, as yet, have a comprehensive picture of tenants' views on the services provided by the Association. However a questionnaire has been drafted and consultants commissioned to shortly carry out a survey of tenants. Although the Association has not carried out a comprehensive survey of its tenants, over 80% of tenants we interviewed during the course of our inspection felt that the Association took their views into account when making decisions.
- 5.18 Service users approaching the Association receive a high standard of customer care. The overwhelming majority of tenants we interviewed felt that the Association staff were highly accessible and considered the staff to be either helpful or very helpful.
- 5.19 The Association also makes available a comment box for service users at the reception area of its office. This initiative is promoted by the Association's reception staff and items in its regular Tenant Newsletter. We looked at a sample of comments and found that a small number of these returns were actually complaints. However the Association did not process these through their formal complaints policy and procedures. These complainants could therefore be disadvantaged as they had no access to the provisions of the formal complaints

- process. Following our inspection, the Association now monitors and acts upon any comments in order that potential complaints are not overlooked.
- 5.20 Social landlords should give stakeholders the information they need about the organisation and its plans, services and performance. Hillhead regularly publishes details of its performance against targets in annual reports, quarterly tenant newsletters and on its website. The Association does not however provide tenants with comparisons of its own performance to that of other landlords. This would allow tenants to see how well the association is performing in relative terms.
- 5.21 Of the 40 tenants we spoke to during our inspection, 85% felt that the Association was good at keeping them informed.

Ethical Standards

Staff and governing body members should promote values that underpin good governance and should act with honesty and integrity, focusing on the best interests of the organisation and its service users.

- 5.22 Hillhead recognises the importance of committee members and staff maintaining high ethical standards. All staff and committee members have undertaken training in relation to Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. We found that Hillhead acts in accordance with statutory requirements relating to the granting of benefits. The Association achieves high standards in managing potential conflicts of interest. It has in place registers of interest for both staff and committee members which are completed annually and signed off by the Chairperson.

Managing risk

Social landlords should be aware of all the risks they face and put in place robust arrangements to minimise these risks and to deal with them if they do occur.

- 5.23 Recognising weaknesses in its approach to risk management, in late 2005 the Association held a workshop involving a group of its governing body members and staff. This led to a comprehensive review of its 2003 Risk Strategy. The list of risk factors were updated, controls considered and thereafter prioritised. In

January 2006 a risk matrix and map was produced and an updated Risk Strategy is presently under preparation. At its annual strategy day, governing body members and staff review the current operating environment. Existing and potential risks are identified and discussed. For each business objective a risk assessment is carried out, control actions identified and review processes agreed.

- 5.24 The Association's three year programme of Internal Audit is controlled by the Audit sub committee. The proposed programme of audits is reviewed annually and targeted appropriately at specific business needs. The Audit sub committee meets to consider all reports and their recommendations. Implementation and monitoring is thereafter passed to the Association's Director.
- 5.25 In summary, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 has many strengths in relation to its governance. Its management committee has a clear understanding of its role. There is a well developed and comprehensive planning and performance management framework in place. The Association encourages tenant involvement in a variety of ways but, to date, it has only met with very limited success. The Association has shown a good awareness of the importance of high ethical standards.

Financial viability and management

Social landlords should be financially viable in the medium term and sustainable in the longer term and should have a robust financial management framework.

- 5.26 In 2006, the Association completed five year financial projections for the period through to 2010/11. This information suggests that the Association does have exposure to financial risk which can be explained by their stock profile and funding structure. This is typical of newly registered stock transfer organisations. However the Association does remain financially viable in the medium term. Our assessment of the Association's short to medium term financial viability remains valid at the time of our inspection.

Financial performance	2004/05 Actual	2005/06 Actual	2006/07 Estimated Out-turn	2007/08 Projected*
	£	£	£	£
Turnover	1,943,857	3,001,184	2,555,900	2,280,200
Operating Surplus/ (Deficit)	827,270	819,375	950,100	(840,800)
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	872,307	989,112	1,201,600	(608,400)

*Based upon the Association's 2007 Five Year Financial Projections

5.27 Hillhead HA 2000's past financial performance has been satisfactory; however there remain concerns regarding the longer term financial viability of the organisation. Its recent 30 year Business Plan confirms that, on the basis of present projections, the Association is not viable in the longer term. Delays in the Association's stock transfer and new build housing programme have resulted in inflation eroding the value of the New Housing Partnership grant initially awarded by the Scottish Executive. However, the local Area Office of Communities Scotland has provisionally indicated their willingness to provide additional resources to the Association in the form of Housing Association Grant (HAG). The outcome of the current negotiations around the level of grant is likely to have a major influence on the future viability of the organisation.

5.28 Hillhead's financial management framework is well developed. Comprehensive budget proposals are presented to governing body members annually. The budget information is comprehensive with a significant level of detailed analysis and supporting narrative. Timing of the annual presentation is sufficient to allow full consideration. We saw evidence of revisions being instructed and approval granted by the management committee prior to the commencement of the new financial year. The Association's quarterly Management Reports were examined and found to be clear and adequate. Variances encountered in the Balance Sheet were explained, but not in every instance.

5.29 In summary, Hillhead's financial projections show the Association to be viable in the short to medium term. The Association's financial management framework is good. The longer term viability of the Association will be significantly influenced by the outcome of their negotiations with Communities Scotland regarding levels of HAG for the remaining programme of proposed new build housing.

6. Areas for improvement action

These are the key areas that need to be targeted for improvement action. They are broadly in order of priority within each of the key service areas.

Across all of its activities, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 should:

- continuing to promote membership of the Association and improve attendance levels at its AGM; and
- develop an Action Plan building on the findings from its proposed comprehensive tenant survey.

In housing management, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 should:

- improve the general environment across the estate and in particular the common closes and areas around the blocks of tenement flats;
- reduce the time taken to re-let* its houses;
- improve the time taken to process applications for housing;
- increase transparency around how the Association allocates its houses;
- establish appropriate partnership working in order to deal with more serious antisocial behaviour;
- establish monitoring and reporting systems for settling in visits for new tenants; and
- ensure that NOPs* are only used in appropriate circumstances.

In property maintenance, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 should:

- meet all its legislative duties regarding Right to Repair*;
- establish and introduce a programme of cyclical maintenance*;
- improve its performance in response repairs*;
- improve security for tenants of tenement flats; and
- ensure that performance figures for responsive repairs* are accurate.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 This report highlights our findings following this housing inspection. We expect all organisations to respond effectively to our recommendations using their own improvement planning processes. We ask organisations that receive fair or poor assessments overall in their housing management, property maintenance or governance and financial management to submit an improvement plan to us within eight weeks of the publication of this report. The plan should show how the organisation intends to respond to our findings. We will inspect once every five years and follow up improvement plans after two years.
- 7.2 Hillhead Housing Association 2000 should produce an improvement plan to show how it intends to respond to our findings in housing management and property maintenance. The plan will be agreed with us.
- 7.3 If you would like to see Hillhead Housing Association 2000's improvement plan you should contact:

Hillhead Housing Association 2000
60 Highfield Road
Hillhead
Kirkintilloch G66 2PS

Telephone: 0141 578 0200

E-mail: admin@hillheadhousing.org

Website: www.hillheadhousing.org

Sources of Evidence

Groups and third parties consulted

- Communities Scotland Area Team
- Communities Scotland Tenant Participation Team
- Communities Scotland Community Ownership Team
- East Dunbartonshire Council
- Antonine Housing Co-operative
- Strathclyde Police
- Citizens Advice

Interviews / meetings

- Members of the RSL's Management Committee
- Director
- Housing Manager
- Technical manager
- Finance manager
- Frontline housing and property maintenance staff
- Discussions with a range of tenants and service users

Reality checks

- Review of arrears cases
- Review of legal actions against tenants
- Review of anti-social behaviour cases
- Review of gas safety documents
- Review of complaints
- Review of reported repairs
- Review of housing list applications and allocations
- Review of void management records
- Review of information for applicants and tenants
- Shadowing* arrears visits
- Shadowing* repairs post-inspection
- Shadowing* tenancy sign-up
- Shadowing* void inspection
- Estate visits
- Observation of the provision of information and advice
- Observation of Management Committee meeting
- Observation of Maintenance Sub Committee
- Observation of Development Sub Committee
- Observation of Customer Care Working Group meeting
- Observation at Appeals hearing

Key documents reviewed

- Inspection submission
- Annual accounts for 2005/06
- Budget 2006/07
- Management accounts (2006/07 – quarter ending September 2006)
- Register of benefits to committee members (Schedule 7 Register)
- Internal audit reports
- Allocations policy
- Allocations suspensions policy
- Former tenant arrears policy and procedures
- Arrears and Housing Benefit policy and procedures
- Estate Management policy and procedures
- Abandoned houses policy and procedures
- Void Management policy and procedures
- Tenant participation strategy
- Complaints policy
- Policy on reactive, cyclical and major repairs
- Planned Maintenance programme
- Right to Repair policy
- Gas Servicing policy
- Asbestos Management Plan
- Asbestos Register
- Rechargeable Repairs policy
- Equal Opportunities policy
- Minute of Agreement between East Dunbartonshire Council and Hillhead Housing Association 2000
- Performance Review 2003-2004
- Annual performance and statistical returns to Communities Scotland
- Performance monitoring reports for arrears, allocation and repairs response times
- Tenant Newsletters
- Internal Management Plan 2005-2008
- Team Plans
- Staff Performance Appraisal documentation
- Training and Development Plan documentation
- Standing Orders
- Committee remits
- Association's constitution and rules
- Committee members' induction information
- Committee members' self assessment and Training Plans
- Corporate Training Plan
- Tenant participation and Consultation Strategy
- Association's Tenant Survey 2007 – Provisional Results
- Schedule 7 Register
- Risk Strategy

Glossary

Affordability	An Assessment of what a tenant can pay towards an arrear after living costs and other debts have been taken account off.
Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR)	Annual questionnaire completed by RSLs and sent to Communities Scotland. Used to keep the Register of Social Landlords up to date and to track the performance of RSLs.
Arrears direct payments	Payments direct to a landlord from a tenants state benefits to cover outstanding arrears.
Average	The arithmetic mean – the sum of all the values divided by the number of values.
Benchmarking	A process used by organisations to systematically compare service processes and performance to identify best practice.
Clyde Housing Connections	A group of Dunbartonshire RSLs that have formed a consortium and have developed a common website address
Common housing register	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
Cyclical maintenance	Planned programme of work to deal with predictable deterioration of building components, for example regular painting of window frames.
Focus group	A group of people brought together to have a structured discussion on a specific subject or set of subjects.
Housing list	A list of applicants for housing which is used by the RSL to allocate its housing stock.
ICT	A landlord's information communication technology system.
Industrial and Provident Society	An organisation conducting its business, either as a co-operative or for the benefit of the community, and which is registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965.
Inspection submission	Documents submitted by the landlord at the start of the inspection to provide information to on its performance, context and how it is structured.
Internal Management Plan (IMP)	Strategic plan which sets out what the organisation aims and objectives are as well as outlining how it will achieve them.

Life cycle costing	A method of calculating the cost and timing of the repairs to, and replacement of, major building components.
National median	The central value of the ordered performance of all Scottish RSLs.
Non Technical Arrears	Rental charges owed to a landlord after any outstanding Housing Benefit claims or payments have been taken account of.
Notice of proceedings (NOP)	Documentation required to be served by a landlord advising the tenant(s) of the landlords intention to raise an action in the courts to end the tenancy.
Partnering	A structured contract management approach to improve efficiency and reduce confrontation between the RSL and its consultants and contractors. Partnering requires formalised objectives, agreed problem solving methods and an active search for continued measurable improvements.
Peer group	A group of organisations facing similar tasks and challenges with which comparisons can be made. RSLs choose which peer group they belong to when they submit their APSRs.
Performance indicator	A measure of how a RSL is achieving its objectives. Performance Indicators can be compared with a pre-set standard (a benchmark) or with other organisations.
Performance Standards	Housing standards for all social landlords in Scotland.
Planned maintenance	The planned renewal or maintenance of key property components.
Post Inspection	Inspection by a member of the landlords staff to check the on the quality or deal with a complaint concerning a response repair.
Pre inspection	Inspection by a member of the landlords staff to check the on the exact nature of the work required before ordering a response repair.
Procurement	The way an organisation obtains services or materials from other organisations or agents.
Quartile	The range represented by one quarter of the ordered performance of all Scottish RSLs. So for example, the upper quartile is the top 25% of RSLs.
Rechargeable repairs	Work that is the responsibility of the tenant but has been done by the landlord.

Registered social landlord (RSL)	A landlord providing social rented housing that is registered and regulated by Communities Scotland.
Re-lets	Lets made to the second or subsequent tenant. Distinguished from new lets that are made when the property is first built or modernised.
Response repairs	Day to day repairs carried out on a reactive basis, distinguishable from planned, capital or cyclical maintenance.
Right to Buy	Many Scottish secure tenants have the right to buy their property at a discounted price subject to length of tenancy.
Right to Repair	Statutory scheme which sets out timescales for some repairs and actions which can be taken if timescales exceeded.
Schedule of Rates	List of costs for repair items ,usually organised by trade.
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	The independent body appointed to investigate individual complaints against public service bodies including Registered Social Landlords (RSL).
Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)	Was brought into to ensure minimum quality standards across all of Scotland's homes and is to be achieved by 2015.
Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST)	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.
Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST)	Section 34 and schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establish the basic conditions when a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy can apply to some tenants of social landlords in Scotland in place of a full SST.
Schedule 7 of the The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001	Defines how those involved with RSLs (governing body members and staff) do not benefit in an inappropriate fashion.
Section 5 referral	Under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 a local authority can request a registered social landlord which has accommodation in its area to provide accommodation to homeless people. This request is known as a Section 5 referral.
Serious arrears	Where a tenant owes more than 13 weeks rent payments and this is more than £250.
Service level agreement	An agreement between departments within an organisation

(SLA)	or between partner organisations that defines the type and level of service they will provide.
Shadowing	An inspection technique that involves accompanying and observing staff while they carried out their day-to-day tasks.
SMART	Performance management acronym for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound.
Stakeholder(s)	Any person organisation who obtains a service from the landlord or is effected by the landlords actions.
Standard Arrears letters	A series of general letters held by a landlord to be sent out to tenants in arrears.
Statutory reasonable preference categories	People who have one of these housing needs: homelessness, overcrowding, large families, living in below tolerable standard housing or unsatisfactory living conditions.
Stock transfer RSL	An RSL where the majority of its houses were acquired as a result of a transfer of local Authority or Scottish Homes houses to it.
Suspension or Suspension Policy	Policy by which a landlord may temporarily suspend an applicant from receiving offers from its housing list as defined in the 1987 Housing (Scotland) Act and amended in the 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act.
Technical Arrears	Rental charges owed to a landlord as a result of an outstanding Housing Benefit claim or payment.
Tenant Assessor	Tenant assessors are trained lay people (tenants) who are part of the inspection team. They are involved in the preparation for the inspection, reading landlord materials and on-site visits as well as talking to tenants.
Turnover (empty houses)	The number of houses that are vacated in a year expressed as a percentage of the landlords housing stock.
Wider Action	Actions taken by a landlord outside of its normal landlord role to promote social inclusion in the communities it serves.

Regulation & Inspection

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